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KT photo | **Tim Bath**
Rob Burgess, Tribune night editor

House of Burgess: My name, is my name

In which our hero's identity is stolen.

By Rob Burgess
Tribune columnist

It was Jan. 14. It was my day off. I was in line at Goodwill with my wife, Ash. In my hand was a slightly gnarled paperback edition of Tim O'Brien's novel "July, July."

The posted cost of one non-hardback book was 99 cents, plus Indiana sales tax. The cashier informed me the price was a dollar and some change. My debit card was swiped. The verdict: declined.

I asked the cashier to run my card through the machine once more, confident I had more than 110 pennies in the bank. Same thing; no good. Ash paid in cash. We left the store and went straight to the bank.

I had a bad feeling about this, as I had heard of the giant Target security breach.

Once inside the bank, we were instructed to take seats in the foyer, facing the windowed offices of the senior bankers. I knew things were amiss as we saw the banker in the office in front of us glare at his screen and shake his head steadily back and forth in a swivel.

Not good. Not good, at all.

Soon after, we were sitting across the desk from him. He explained — unless we had perfected some sort of teleportation scheme — a series of transactions in southern California had ripped us off the day before. On top of this, hundreds of dollars of fees were piling up on our account due to the sudden overdraft status. He filed a dispute on our behalves and proceeded to begin freeing up some cash until the stolen funds could be replenished.

We were sent away stunned, with orders to return the following day to continue dealing with the mess. Once we arrived home, I began piecing the puzzle together. Someone — or perhaps several someones — had hacked into the Target system and extracted enough personal information to

recreate my debit card. They then took this phony plastic to several different ATMs.

I felt betrayed. I felt wronged. Who was this person running around the Golden State pretending to be me? Did he look like me? Did he sound like me? Was he even a man?

As you might have guessed by the name of this column, “House of Burgess,” I take my name seriously. It’s all I have. This betrayal was primal. Out of sheer curiosity, I plugged the addresses of the transgressions into Google Earth. I selected Street View option and tried to picture my doppelgänger in each one.

What I saw wasn’t pretty. One location shared a building with a sketchy-looking coin laundry. Another had a common parking lot with a haggard doughnut shop. I couldn’t see myself frequenting any of these locations. No, not this Burgess. Maybe a fraudulent Burgess, but not this one.

Three days passed. The stolen monies had been refunded, new cards had been issued and fees were steadily being reversed. Countless others were having the same experience.

“In December, [Target] said credit- and debit-card data for as many as 40 million people who shopped in its stores between Nov. 27 and Dec. 15 may have been compromised,” reported Bloomberg News’ Michael Riley on Friday. “Earlier this month, the company said the thieves also got access to

the names, phone numbers and home and email addresses of as many 70 million people. Target hasn't disclosed details about how its point of sale system was breached."

That same day, I checked my email and found a message from none other than Gregg Steinhafel, Target chairman, president and CEO. "I am writing to make you aware that your name, mailing address, phone number or email address may have been taken during the intrusion," read the Friday email.

No kidding, Gregg!

I don't feel special. If anything, I was just another name on a long, long spreadsheet. "Information stolen during the Target security breach is now being divided up and sold off regionally, a South Texas police chief said Monday," reported WDFW and the Associated Press.

Actually, it makes me about as average as possible.

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